

Lendl Barcelos

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The Utter Limits: Labyrinths of Xenop(h)o(n)etics

As with any (post-)structuralist of sufficient complexity, one must be careful when invoking particular aspects of their labyrinth in order to avoid having to present the entire system. This is especially the case when, throughout the course of their writing, structures have been rebuilt. Avoiding the millions of words written by the followers of Lacan (from Althusser to Zupančič) that result in varied substructures, extensions and renovations, I will focus on a single paper from his *Écrits*: “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” An even further circumscription is necessary so as to avoid dead-ends and self-similar pathways. For if, while navigating the Lacanian concept-space of his essay, one were to travel deep into his labyrinth it would become necessary to re-present what came before—again and again and... Without any thread to guide, we must be cautious; a well-constructed labyrinth affords no escape. Without resorting to too much redundancy, let us follow and trace several seemingly disparate threads. All extrapolation requires re-tracing, and all I can commit to is an attempt to do so non-trivially.

Other Speech

“Ce que je cherche dans la parole, c'est la réponse de l'autre.”
 [“What I seek in speech is the response of the other.”]
 —Lacan (Fr.299 | 247)¹

For Jacques Lacan speech [*la parole*] functions within language [*le langage*], although it is not always the case that the field of language is primed for speech to take place. For him, the distinguishing feature between a language that affords speech and one that does not is “the fixed correlation between its [a language’s] signs and the reality they

¹ Citations from original French sources will follow the following format: Fr.<page number(s)>.

signify” (246). When there is a one-to-one correlation within a language between a sign and its referent it is not capable of providing a field for speech to operate on. To illustrate this point, Lacan uses an example of the communication of bees. A bee returning to their hive, after successfully gathering nectar, is able to transmit detailed information about the location of the source of nectar via a ‘wagging dance.’ The bee’s dance is a precise code or system of signalling that scientists were able to decode after years of observation. It was realized that the frequency of the bee’s gyration could be directly linked to the direction of the location of the nectar and its distance from the hive (Lacan 245-246).

For Lacan, the rigidity of this apian communication makes it unable to attain the status of a ‘proper’ language, a language affording speech. In order for the latter to occur, it would be necessary for language to become flexible so that a subject may begin to operate on language itself—or be operated on by it—and in this process modify it. At the limit of this modification—a creation of a singular use of language—it is possible that the subject’s language ceases to work. Lacan formulates this as “the antinomy immanent in the relations between speech and language ... The more functional language becomes, the less suited it is to speech, and when it becomes overly characteristic of me alone, it loses its function as language” (246).

Speech can then, for Lacan, be situated on a continuum between two poles. When navigating towards one limit we ultimately arrive at communication, where speech becomes impossible as it turns into an inflexible one-to-one system or code. Moving toward the other limit results in nonsense as speech becomes so completely idiosyncratic—a pure flexibility—that it launches out of language and loses all meaning, at least to everyone but the speaker.² In order for speech to operate on language—i.e. in order for speech to occur at all—a balance must be struck between flexibility and rigidity. So, for

² See Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* for an in-depth argument against the possibility of such a ‘private language’ (§243–315).

Lacan, speech occurs like a pendulum swinging between the poles of a purely rigid exteriority and a purely flexible interiority. Without a subject, such as in the example of apian communication, no speech can occur and, inversely, with a solipsistic ‘subject’ that has no other, speech becomes de-coupled from language and ceases to make sense. Yet speech without language is hardly speech because it is an operation without a field to operate on. To reiterate: at the limits of speech are communication and nonsense, both of which foreclose the possibility of speech.

Speech necessitates the other; it is necessarily intersubjective. Lacan makes explicit reference to this: “the speech value of a language is gauged by the intersubjectivity of the ‘we’ it takes on” (247). In speech, we are faced with an intersubjective relation: an *I* attempting to exceed—or supersede—itsself in order to evoke a response by an other to form a ‘we.’ In a certain sense, both poles of the linguistic continuum—subjectless & solipsistic—have no speech value. In order for a language to have a speech value it must invoke an other. This is precisely why it is necessary, for Lacan, that the subject seeks an other in speech. It is with this that the epigraph above begins to evoke sense.

[Followed Threads; or, Walking a Détourned Line]

“Who enters, into the text ... through the door of quotation?”
—Cixous (103)

Hélène Cixous enters. Let us take a stroll with her and trace a path out of step with the rest. Bracketed interludes will be used to follow threads she has laid: lines of thought, plot lines, plot holes, *Stigmata*.³ Having carefully entered the Lacanian labyrinth above, Cixous offers words of caution: “one must enter the labyrinth of a text with a thread” (87). So, I call on Hélène Cixous to lend me her thread, but also to help me thread through “sentences whose trace I will be following, a trace which is familiar and

³ *Stigmata* is the title of Hélène Cixous’ book from which all of the citations to her in this paper are from.

yet foreign” (84). Even *I* becomes⁴ equivocal—familiar and foreign. To be sure the *I* cited differs from the *I* that calls on Cixous, although when seamlessly interwoven via citation the distinction begins to blur and ambiguity becomes a tactic. Identification finds polyvalent sense, depending on the contexts it appears. To navigate the labyrinth that is the Lacanian concept-space of speech—as outlined in the structure above—I turn to Cixous for communion, who offers her poetic text.

She offers me a way to move through this space. She is intimately familiar with moving through the labyrinthine contours of a text. “All it takes is not letting go of the thread” (Cixous, 87). Hearing her words⁵, I won’t let go. But her thread, as presented here, appears somewhat frayed and seemingly to be coming undone. For I do not re-cite her text in all its integrity, only portions, out of order, out of their original context and mixed with my own. I am re-presenting her text at my discretion and, in this, I risk making an imposition. I must be cautious not to stray too far away from the lines running through her text, or I might lose her thread and also myself. Here she speaks: “I do not want my soul to be clothed in a borrowed appearance which will phantomize me” (94). She is not a phantom, nor a ghost; here, she is my guide. A guide whose voice speaks more than is re-presented here. Still this selection process is needed to enter into contact with her text, in order to move with her. Being in a textual labyrinth, I will walk this course, interweaving my words with hers, threading her words through mine. Tracing her sentences, I am led. Her speech and mine moving alongside each other; “who speaks here is already the stranger, who comes from the other world. And he is not the only one to speak. It’s a concert” (92). I am not the only one to speak, for we speak in concert. Am I the ‘stranger’ she evokes? Do I come from the ‘other world’? Perhaps.

Although her words and my words may at times be the same—for language is not ours to own and we can both operate on it—our words may point to different things.

⁴ To risk an excessive clarity, the verb form ‘becomes’ rather than ‘become’ is intentional as will become clear in the section below.

⁵ In fact, ‘her words’ are actually those of her translator, but we will leave this as an incidental re-mark for now.

I will mainly be focusing on the text, “‘Mamãe, disse ele,’ or Joyce’s second Hand,” which appears as chapter 7 in *Stigmata*. There, the sentences whose trace she follows differ from the ones I now follow—she moves from Ovid to Joyce, Lispector to Rimbaud. The latter is our shared reference. Ambiguities abound affording unforeseen, resonant mixtures. I walk along the lines of her thought, she already having laid her trace.

It is somewhat ambiguous whether or not I am here entering into dialogue with Cixous, but if ‘we’ can be used to describe our proximity then this can perhaps be described as speech; or, this text can be said to have a speech-value. In fact, this mixing of voices performs the necessary Lacanian requirement that constitutes speech; it folds language, without producing solipsism.⁶ Cixous’ thread keeps me and my text company:

This text ... is thick with a company of quotations. Citation is the voice of the other, and it highlights the double playing of the narrative authority. We constantly hear the footsteps of the other, the footsteps of others in language (Cixous 85).

Her words thicken. The presence of her cited voice becomes the voice of the other. But in it we can hear her footsteps, the patterns she t(h)reads through language. I can follow her by perking my ears toward the echoes of her steps. Recontextualizing her voice as I do, I perform a *détournement* but we also a *dérive*.⁷ Her text helps to sound as-yet-unheard(/unknown) sympathies, where “all of this resonates in the labyrinth of the inner ear” (92). Perhaps her words sound out of place; “*I do not want to belong*, they repeat” (94). Quotation marks a difference. Its marks betray the equivocal nature of I.

Let us not lose our initial thread. Such long (bracketed) detours risk ramifying concept-spaces into labyrinths of their own. I do not wish to lose *you*. No, what I seek is to commune with Hélène Cixous, to give her space to puncture holes into the text. I continue to call out to her. She is “summoned by the call, so as to return at least to his

⁶ The process of seeking the response of the other via textual invocation will be addressed from a different angle in another section of this paper below.

⁷ The Situationist *dérive* is “an instructive pleasure, the *dérive*, or drift, was defined ... as the ‘technique of locomotion without a goal,’” where for a certain moment usual reasons for movement are paused and one lets “themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.” (Plant 58)

ears" (102); at least to my ears, but also perhaps to *yours*. Several threads have been laid, so let us end this *dérive* and return. I have not let go of the initial thread, and Cixous—as the voice of the other via citation—can still lead me back: "When one has no thread and cannot go by land, one goes by air. This is what poets do" (87).

* * *

Other Self

"Je est un autre."

[I is an other.]

—Rimbaud (Fr.252 | 100)

Leave it to a 17-year-old poet, Arthur Rimbaud, to chronoportatively add an interesting twist to Lacan's labyrinth. If for Lacan speech is a relation between *I* and an other, what would happen if it were possible to identify *I* with this other? It must be made clear that this is not the same gesture as with the solipsistic 'subjectivity' that is released from language. With a solipsistic 'subject,' the other is erased by being assimilated. The identification, in this case, of *I* and other is such that all that remains is *I*(diosyncrasy). In no way does Rimbaud wish to do away with the other in writing "I is an other;" (100) on the contrary, he wishes to other himself. His process of becoming-other proceeds "through a long, boundless, and systematized *disorganization of all the senses*. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness" (102). This "[i]neffable torture" (100, translation modified) is an operation "to attain the unknown" (100). If the 'speech' of the solipsistic 'subject' produces nonsense, it is because they are using a private language of their own that is intelligible to no one but them. In contrast, the *I* of Rimbaud—an alien *I*—is a becoming-other, arriving at sense [*sens*] radically outside its own. In order to reach this unknown, what is required is for all organized sense to be disorganized.

Whether or not such a process could ever be completed, whether or not a subject could ever fully be identified as other, is beside the point. What is critical is that through a

systematic disorganization, speech begins to contort language into forms-as-yet-unknown to the subject. That is to say, the disorganization of the senses [*sens*] applies not only to a disorientation of the physical senses, but also—since we must be attentive to the polyvalent aspects of the word—to a reconfiguration of meaning: an unruly sense. It is for this reason that Rimbaud stresses that it is “the poet” that undergoes this process (102). Could this not serve as a definition of a poet: to be one that contorts language in such a way so as to arrive at forms-as-yet-unknown, to reach sense that even the poet has not experienced before, or even to create novel ways of sensing the same language?

Yet, does not poetry still require an other? Of course, otherwise we arrive back at the solipsistic ‘subject.’ Even though *I* is an other, this does not rule out that there are still others. The *I* is *an* other, but not *the* other. The xeno-poet (other-poet) creates aberrant speech that is not quite nonsensical and thus calls on others to respond. It may even be possible to assert that poetry constructs new operations of speech on language that extend the horizons of the field of speech, to which others establish the speech value of the extension—the extent to which the new horizon can be shared or taken up by others. In order for the latter to be the case, the xeno-poet’s speech must not depart from language; this speech must not reach the limit state of pure disorganization.

A pure disorganization⁸ is nothing but the death of the subject (and) of speech. But even in death, so long as the poet has extended the horizons of the field of speech within language, others can continue where the poet has ceased.

He [The poet] attains the unknown, and if, demented, he finally loses the understanding of his visions, he will at least have seen them! So what if he is destroyed in his ecstatic flight through things unheard of, unnameable: other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the first one has fallen! (Rimbaud 102-103)

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, following Antonin Artaud, name this the Body-without-Organs. See *Logic of Sense* and the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

[Daedalus; or, The Cunning of Language]

“With the call of his name, Daedalus leads monsters, mutants, chimeras. His story is an entanglement of prison and freedom.”

—Cixous (87)

Another name invoked to lead. Hélène Cixous calls out to Daedalus. Let it be clear that he is not being invoked here with explicit reference to his son, the fallen Icarus. Yet, it is perhaps by misdirecting the words of Rimbaud above that we, instead of hearing a call to Icarus, begin to hear a second call to Daedalus, the crafty father. Rimbaud evokes Icarus when he writes, “destroyed in his ecstatic flight” and “the horizons where the first one has fallen” (102-103). As is well known, Icarus as the first to fly, is also the first to fall from his flight, having flown too high and destroying his wings. But, for Cixous, one cannot call out to Icarus without also calling out to his father. “Let us speak of Icarus, that is to say of Daedalus, that is to say of death and of the name,” she writes. To speak of Icarus is already to speak of Daedalus, so a call to one will be a call to the other. One name becomes a cypher for the other, so let us part with the name of Icarus and focus on his father, *the* labyrinth’s designer. It is after all, Daedalus who knows its contours.

Yet, “he connotes no more than losing one’s way. Poor Daedalus. Daedalus has become the synonym of his work: the labyrinth and vice versa” (Cixous 86). He loses his way, but still he leads. He “leads monsters, mutants, chimeras” (Cixous 87). He is a leader who goes astray or, better, a leader of those who have gone astray. Cixous provides text that gives sense to the patterns of this leader:

Through Daedalus, who steers from one extreme to the other, we thus have access to the passage, to the trans, to the crossing of borders, to the delimitation of genres-genders-genres and species, to construction and to deconstruction, to metamorphosis. (87)

Daedalus then is one who leads to transgression, ‘the crossing of borders.’ He only appears to go astray to those circumscribed within predefined limits, but this is only what appears to be the case. As a craftsman, Daedalus understands material limits and

*mètically*⁹ (cunningly) mutates them, developing strange hybrids. Being hybrids, his creativity operates via reorganization. The labyrinth is composed of materials that were already there, only now they are recontoured into paths, spirals, dead-ends.

When transposed to a sonic register, we can say that Daedalus *mètically* opens his ears and listens to language's inherent polyvalence and equivocality. "If only we listen, a language always speaks several languages at once, and runs with a single word in opposite directions" (Cixous x). Forms-as-yet-unknown are hidden in plain sight, hidden in plain audition. As will become more and more clear—throughout this paper and beyond—the field of language itself is primed with self-similarities that afford linguistic short-circuits. "We have much to learn from these differences between resemblances" (Cixous 97). Homophones are an exemplary case. As before, Cixous provides us with some guidance: "Only words in love sow [*Seul les mots qui s'aiment sèment*]" (121). In the French—which is the reason for its appearance in the text—the final words '*s'aiment*' (to be in love) and '*sèment*' (sow) are homophonically equivalent, although typographically dissimilar. The translator leaves the original, because the English does not convey the same aural connection. English ears fall deaf to the connections made between love and sow in French. It is as if the French language itself reifies their relation.

Aural ambiguity, of course, may also lead to mishearing. In some sense, speech—as an acoustic intersubjective operation—is illusive. When I listen to the call of the other, their intention can be elusive. "[F]or whoever has poeticizing ears there is the call" (Cixous 92). 'Poeticizing ears' (ears that create). These ears, by exploiting the sonic self-similarity of words, can hear unintended senses. This is how a listener can engage in xeno-phonetics: an illusive/elusive gesture. It is illusive because it relies on the occult potential of the sound of a word that might deceive the listener and elusive, because a word's equivocality enables multiple meanings to slide into each other. With ears perked

⁹ Two French historians specializing in Ancient Greece, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, revived this notion, noticing most scholars of Ancient Greece had neglected the concept. *Mētis* is an Ancient Greek form of (cunning) intelligence. It is opposed to *Logos* and can be intuitively grasped as a way of 'crafting' a situation so as to achieve the maximum gain with the minimum effort. See in particular their book-length study *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*.

up to what Cixous names “[c]landestine semantics” (121), language begins to play itself out in a different manner and “defamiliarization” becomes the angle at which speech is heard (92). Homophonically, a word and its sonic twin interchange. “The one translates itself into the other” (Cixous 94). ‘Poeticizing ears’ expose this creativity in the audition of sound, of speech. In attending to a sound, the listener—even the one who simply hears—is never just passively receiving. They are constantly forming and reforming the sounds they are steeped within. Xeno-phonetics is not foreign to Cixous—one of the reasons for her being selected as a guiding thread. She even describes it as a common sensation. “We all have the impression of having already heard it, but otherwise, and in another language” (Cixous 101). We will return to this below, outside of this aside. “The repetition almost inverts the meaning of the remark. It has passed, and it returns” (Cixous 122).

Daedalus’ labyrinth entangles prison and freedom. The labyrinth of speech—of aural and of textual intercourse—offers us a flexible intersubjective freedom, but, at its limits, also holds us captive. “Certain texts are on the one hand labyrinths, on the other forges where one performs operations: one melts, like wax, one makes alloys, one resolves and rewelds” (Cixous 116). Texts become double-edged. On the side of the forge, we are beckoned to play, to modify, to cite, to re-cite. The state of play becomes a question that can be posed. On the side of the labyrinth, material is contoured into pathways that never lead to escape. We are stuck, unless Daedalus offers us his guidance. But, until then, let us return to Rimbaud as Cixous offers him a maxim: “Language’s tricks are the allies of the artist who goes into resistance or exile” (x).

* * *

Rimbaud in Africa

“Poetry is fluent silence.”
—Land (“Fanged Noumena” 222)

Eventually, Rimbaud, frustrated by intersubjective speech and its incapacity to move beyond language, ceases to write poetry. He decides to travel through Europe, Asia, and Africa, and finally to live in Ethiopia. His time is no longer spent in constant debauchery; rather, it is devoted to hard labour and the trading of merchandise. All this can be read as his attempt to escape language. Already of somewhat renown by the time he stops writing poetry—even though he is only twenty years of age—Rimbaud goes to great lengths to flee from the confines of his interpellation as a poet. But the unruly nature of the time he spent in Paris, only reified his infamy as an *enfant terrible* and poet. It is said that he would attend literary salons only to heckle the poets and accuse them of being uninspired. As mentioned above, a poet for Rimbaud was one who systematically disorganized sense, so his expectations were quite high. To follow a line of flight outside his title of ‘poet,’ it was necessary to go elsewhere—somewhere his name could not be identified with poetry. It was also necessary to go silent.

Rimbaud never remained fully tacit. Throughout his life as an ex-poet, he continued his correspondence, mostly writing to his family. For a writer wanting to extend the field of speech, this would not be sufficient means to continue. Yet, instead of returning to poetry, he steadfastly refused. Is there silence at the limits of speech? Was the ineffable the only way out of language? Maybe not. “Rimbaud spent a decade trying to dissolve in the Ethiopian sun, but he still died as a poet who had long been silent, rather than as someone who had salvaged their humanity from the insanity of words” (Land, “Thirst for Annihilation” 201). Even his “fluent silence” is poetry, is the act of a poet. It is here that we return to the Lacanian dynamics of speech. For what happens to Lacan’s formula “What I seek in speech is the response of the other” (247) when the other remains silent.

Through “the *summoning* characteristic of speech” (Lacan 245) let us place the late, speechless Rimbaud in the position of the other from which we seek a response. Whatever I seek in speech addressed to him, will be in the form of an annihilated reply. If I seek to operate on language with him, can I be sure that it is via the field of speech? Can I be sure that his silence is a response and not just void that I project into? For Lacan, “all speech calls for a response,” (206) so it is safe to assume that, for him, if I enter into intersubjective speech with Rimbaud there is at least an anticipated answer. But Lacan also writes, “there is no speech without a response, even if speech meets only with silence, provided it has a listener” (206, translation modified). Unless we are able to call on Rimbaud to hear, it will not be possible to summon him and enter into speech with him. How is it possible to open the ears of the deceased Rimbaud in order for him to be able to listen? The inverse relation seems obvious, we need only read Rimbaud to open our ears to the call of his speech, but when we attempt to speak to him he remains silent. What are we to make of this silence? According to Lacan, if we are unaware of how speech functions, then we “will seek a reality beyond speech to fill the emptiness” (206). Not being able to resort to his behaviour—for the corpse of Rimbaud has long since decayed—the only reality available to us ‘beyond speech’ is his writings. We can coerce Rimbaud to respond to the summons of speech through his writings. Not only would this be a narcissistic, quasi-solipsistic endeavour—for we would be ‘subjectively’ plundering through his *œuvres*—but this would also be the response of a young *enfant terrible* and not of the late, silent Rimbaud. So, we are destined either to the impossibility of reading into his bodiless silence or to read, in vain, his disavowed writings. Despite this, Rimbaud has never stopped being called: poet. Attempting to escape over the wall of language he is “charred by the flame of the impossible, Rimbaud treads the edge of the maze” (Land, “Thirst for Annihilation” 203)—or in our case the labyrinth.

Other Words / Outer Worlds

“pour régler le débit de ses oreilles, ... des oreilles pour ne point entendre, autrement dit pour faire la détection de ce qui doit être entendu.”

[“to adjust the receptivity of his or her ears, ... having ears *in order not to hear*, in other words, in order to detect what is to be understood/heard.”]

—Lacan (Fr.253 | 211 translation modified)

Oiseau, which is contained in contemporary poet Christian Bök’s book *Eunoia*, is composed mostly as a set of translations of Arthur Rimbaud’s synaesthetic poem ‘Voyelles.’ One of which is a homophonic translation, ‘Veils.’ Listening to ‘Veils’ with an ear for French gives access to polyvalent sense(s). Although it generally requires a bit of a stretch, since the typical pauses and phrasing does not align from one language to the next, it is still possible to flip back and forth from listening to an English poem and listening to a French poem. When familiar with the original poem, which in *Eunoia* is printed six pages before ‘Veils,’ one is to a far greater extent able to hear “what is to be heard” (Lacan 211, translation modified). In this case, what is to be heard is two-fold: Bök’s English homophonic translation and Rimbaud’s original. Perhaps, the relation between the two is also meant to be heard.

Homophonic translation is a process of parsing a text into different lexical units, while maintaining the phonetic content. A perfect homophonic translation would thus sound exactly the same as the original but be composed of different words. As a basic example one could homophonically translate ‘Rimbaud’ as ‘Rambo.’ Given that phonemes tend to differ from one language to another, most homophonic translations only approximate the sound of the original; they are near-homophonic translations. The question of arriving at a perfect homophonic translation is, of course, compounded when we take into account phrasing, accent, intonation and timbre—these latter three aspects being identified by Mladen Dolar as constitutive of what he names the object voice (20). If a text of homophonic translation is read with an accent other than the one that was

‘intended,’ it will, of course, create difficulties in hearing the original. But, what is phenomenal is that speech enables a homophonic listening to occur, with or without taking the object voice into consideration.

Again we have a case where *I* is an other. Christian Bök’s ‘Veils’ “preserv[es] the original voicing of the sounds” (113). Thus, both poems share the same sonic identity. Yet, the semantic aspects of both poems are radically different. Rimbaud’s ‘Voyelles’ creates a correspondence between the vowels and colours, which he then uses to animate fantastic and symbolic descriptions. Bök’s ‘Veils’ conceals all the original references to vowels, although colours and paint continue to play a major role. When the identity of the poem is made other, via a homophonic translation, is it up to the listener to decide which “*not to hear*” (Lacan 211), to adjust his or her receptivity?

In an essay entitled “Translating the Sound in Poetry: Six Propositions,” Rosmarie Waldrop points out that “sound in poetry is not a simple phonetic matter,” (60) thus problematizing the notion of a sonic identity. She goes on to insist that even within the same language, “different semantic contexts make us hear the same phonemes differently” (60). Not only is this the case with homophones—sink and sync—where it is generally possible to differentiate one from the other given the context,¹⁰ but Waldrop uses an example where the same word is heard differently: “We hear the word *splice* differently in a statement like ‘the splice after frame 39’ and in the pun ‘the splice of life’” (60). So, a sonic identity is modified given its context. In some sense, this relates to Rimbaud’s poetic project of becoming-other since it is due to a continual promiscuity that he vies to open his body to the unknown; or, perhaps, it is more accurate to say that he is preparing *I* to be opened by the unknown.¹¹ In an analogous fashion, a word’s sonic identity is reconfigured

¹⁰ The pun “a synching feeling” complicates the matter, as puns usually do. [Courtesy of @xenopraxis.]

¹¹ For more on the distinction between ‘being open to’ vs ‘being opened by’ see the work of Reza Negarestani, especially the chapter ‘Good Meal’ from his theory-fiction *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*.

and disfigured by the various contexts it promiscuously enters. A listener further complicates this matter because of the adaptability of audition. Both the context of the words being uttered and the manner in which these words are listened to change the way the words are able (not) to be heard.¹²

Other's Throat

"Being would be other to death—either annihilated by it or left
immaculate—*were there not scales.*"
—Land ("Thirst for Annihilation" 129)

I purples, spat blood, laugh of beautiful lips is a composition for solo voice by American composer Aaron Cassidy. A poetic spurt by Nick Land seems to provide us an apt description of the work: "a multiplication of mixed signals ... tick-bite tinnitus intercut with rhythmic pattern virus, a subsemiotic staccato of throat-scratching tick-chatter stitched into the talk-sickness—calling demons" ("Fanged Noumena" 564). The piece uses Rimbaud's 'Voyelles' as well as Bök's homophonic translation and a third "bizarrely poor" (Cassidy) semantic translation of 'Voyelles' into English that Cassidy purloined from the vast network of anonymous amateurs on the internet. What is quite distinctive about the composition is that, although written to be performed by a single vocalist, three vocal parts are printed underneath the rhythmic notation. The performer is directed to sing "any voice part." One might assume that a performer would make a prior selection of one of the parts and sing through it or perhaps leap from one part to another between phrases, but the vocalist is intended to navigate mid-phoneme. Thus, the aptness of Land's description of a "subsemiotic staccato" and "talk-sickness."¹³

¹² The plethora of YouTube music videos subtitled by misheard lyrics is a testament to this phenomenon. See Steve Connor's "Earlips: Of Mishearings and Mondegreens."

¹³ This is, of course, a reference to William Burroughs' inversion of Sigmund Freud's 'talking cure.'

The opening lines of the libretto, with all parts superimposed, could be written as follows: “ANaYnWHEREoirNebLEARBLancANK.”¹⁴ It consists of passages both by Rimbaud “*A noir, E blanc*” and Bök “Anywhere near blank.” Reading the lines in this form, we can begin to hear the two homophonically adjacent poems grate. Yet, as Cassidy states in a program note on his website, he makes

an effort towards ensuring that the texts never devolve to the point of mere sound, mere phonemes—despite the extensive fragmentation (of words, of text, of meaning), their identity as words and as language remains more or less in tact [sic].

It is clear that ‘mere sound’ would be equivalent to the nonsense of the solipsist described above. One operation used to restrict the possibility of perceived nonsense, as is legible in the libretto phrase above, is the repetition of similar phonetic constructions, such as “AN” and “aYn” as well as “anc” and “ANK.” This enables the listener to hear language stutter, while also catching its sense.

To hear the words of all three parts simultaneously requires an extremely attentive ear, but it is nowhere near impossible. What we have is a “multiplication of mixed signals,” (Land, “Thirst for Annihilation” 129) or, as Lacan might have put it, ‘mixed speech.’ For what is occurring is superimposed lines of meaning, all in a somewhat jagged form. On a superficial scale, what we hear is unintelligible—a death of meaning—but on a different scale, as Cassidy describes himself, the “us[e of] common morphemes and phonemes to shift between languages and modes of syntax,” (2014) creates a relative instability that can be frequently stabilized and adumbrated into sense by the listener.¹⁵ *I purples* “destabilize[s] the intricacies of linguistic codes,” (Cassidy 2014) performing an almost Rimbaudian

¹⁴ For clarity, the French original is in lowercase and the English homophonic translation in uppercase.

¹⁵ It is worth mentioning the comedian and phonomagus Reggie Watts, who slips between personas—with distinct accents, clichés and gestures—mid-sentence during his performances. Of particular relevance here is his ‘malfunctioning mic’ gag where he grafts partial words onto each other and breaks off into silenced gestures, all to mimic the effect of a broken microphone. It is possible to read Watts’ gag as confronting the boundaries of language and sense, while commenting on common technological failures—a psychedelia which characterizes our 21st century listening experience. See “Reggie Watts: Humor in music.”

disorganization of sense, contorting language in such a way that what the listener hears is able to slip into and out of sense and speech—an effective gesture, if one takes into consideration the central role Rimbaud takes in the composition.

* * *

To close, we must complete our circle, our circumscription. Remaining within the confines of our initial parameters—to secure ourselves from the millions upon millions of Lacanian words, so as to prevent slipping into his elaborate labyrinth—we will end with the words of Lacan himself; words of a different tenor than the rest. These words buried amongst the footnotes of “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” call out to us. Yet, their message is opaque. These self-same words appear in both the French and English editions of *Écrits* without a single letter of difference. “When we speak it rattles like a jagged stone in our throats,” (Land, “Thirst for Annihilation” 108) so let us hear, in closing, a sound of Lacan’s own, a sound untranslatable and perhaps meaningless. Let us hear Lacan’s sound poem. “Hear ye: *Parfaupe ouclaspa nannanbryle anaphi ologi pysoscline ixwpað anlana—égniakune n'rbiol' ô blijouter têtumaine ennouconç*” (Fr.299 n.1 | 267 n.35)¹⁶

¹⁶ This sound poem is, according to Lacan, a ridding of the redundancies contained within the opening epigraph of his essay.

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